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FAIM E-615 6845

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Washington, D.C. 20520

February 23, 1981

EXCISE

Dear Mr. Sawyer:

I am writing in response to your inquiry of January 22, regarding [redacted] request for an investigation into the Israeli attack upon the Navy communications vessel USS Liberty on June 8, 1967.

Both the U.S. and world news media covered the Liberty incident extensively at the time it occurred and have continued to follow the case in subsequent years. There is no basis for the suggestion that the news media or the U.S. Government have kept the incident from the American public.

Allegations have been periodically made that Israel deliberately attacked the Liberty. The Department has no information that would corroborate these allegations. In 1967, a U.S. Navy Court of Inquiry made a full investigation of the attack upon the Liberty. Officers and men of the Liberty testified at this inquiry, and message traffic to and from the ship was reviewed thoroughly. The transcript of the proceedings of the Court of Inquiry has been available to the public for several years. The Court reached the conclusion that it did not have sufficient information to make a judgment about the reasons for the Israeli action against the Liberty. It is doubtful that a new investigation at this time would resolve the different allegations about the incident, many of which involve assumptions that would be difficult to prove or disprove conclusively.

Israel stated that the attack was the result of confusion and error by its armed forces during the 1967 Arab-Israeli War. The Department of State was deeply concerned by the attack on the Liberty. It immediately made clear to the Government of Israel that the U.S. held Israel responsible for the incident. In turn, the Government of Israel

The Honorable
Harold S. Sawyer,
House of Representatives.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR

REVIEWED BY [signature] DATE 8/5/83

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offered an immediate apology, accepted complete responsibility and offered to pay compensation for the deaths and injuries caused to American personnel by the attack.

Israel paid in full in 1968 and 1969 the U.S. Government claims for $3,323,500 on behalf of the men who were killed and $3,452,275 on behalf of the injured members of the Liberty crew. Although there can never be adequate compensation for wrongful death or injury, the families and individuals involved received the full amount of these claims.

The United States also submitted to the Government of Israel a claim for compensation for the physical damage to the ship. Following a series of contacts through diplomatic channels, the U.S. on December 17, 1980 accepted Israel's offer to pay $6,000,000 as final settlement of this claim. Under the terms of the agreement, Israel is to pay the $6,000,000 in three annual installments of $2,000,000 each, and the first installment was paid on January 15, 1981.

Sincerely,

Walter L. Cutler
Acting Assistant Secretary
for Congressional Relations

Enclosure:

Correspondence returned.

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